CATS & DOG, EREL Etc.

by

EULA LONG

Love & Peace and a Laugh

or Two — Enda Peng

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No one listed above is responsible for my outrages.

Eula Long

NOTE: This book is meant to be amusing, but with the suicide cult of militarism draping mourning crepe around the earth, I sometimes lose my cool and wail like the mewing kitten which I'll place, as skull & crossbones, to warn you of a bitter digression. I hope the heavy does not unbalance what I have tried to make light and amusing.

Enola Long

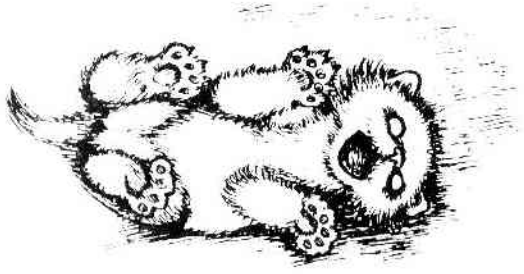

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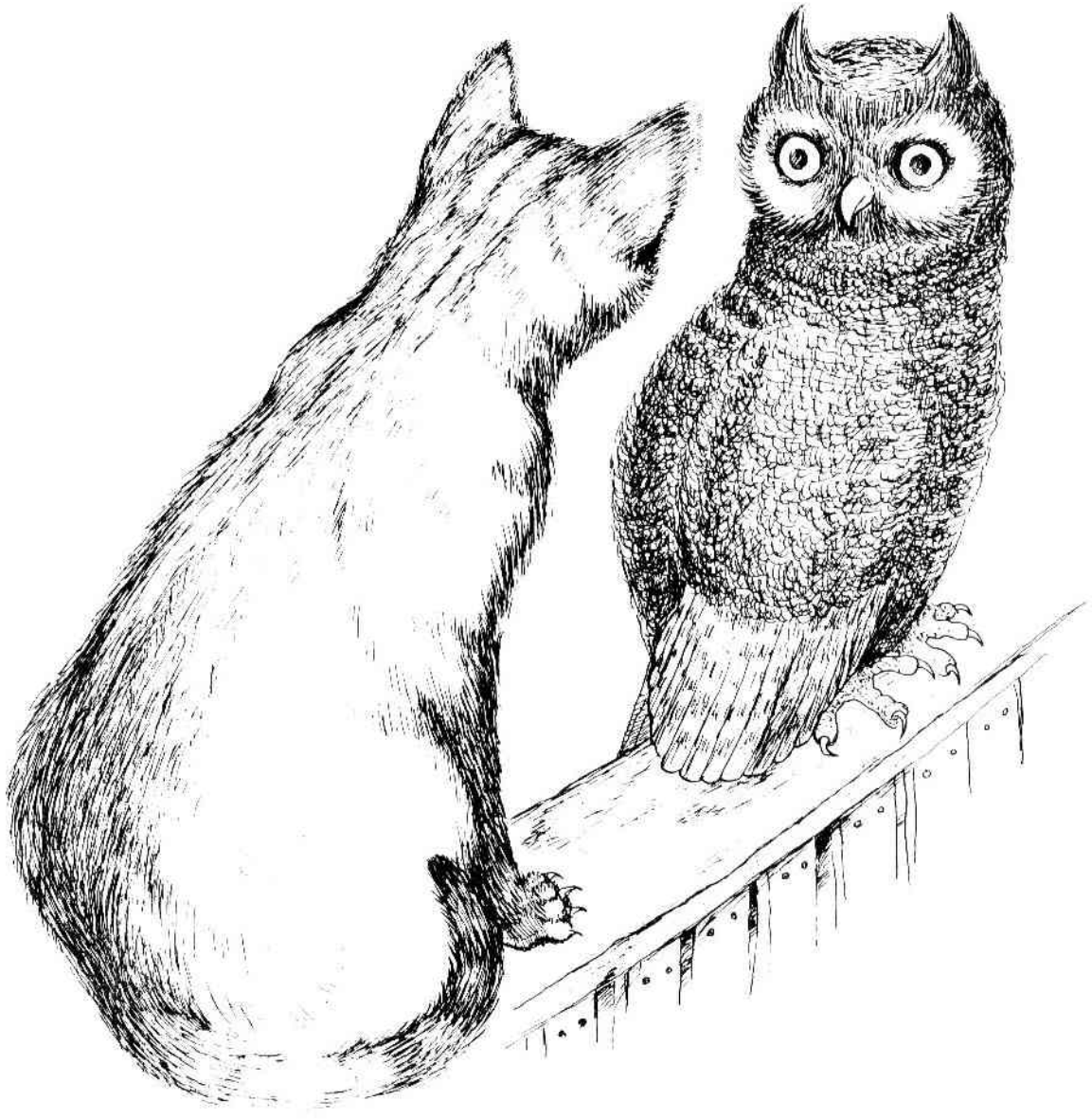
Photo by Simone Wilson

Quote: *The owl and the pussycat*
went to sea in a
beautiful pea
green boat . . .
Unquote



Now whoo whoo whoo said that?
Can you tell me, curious cat?

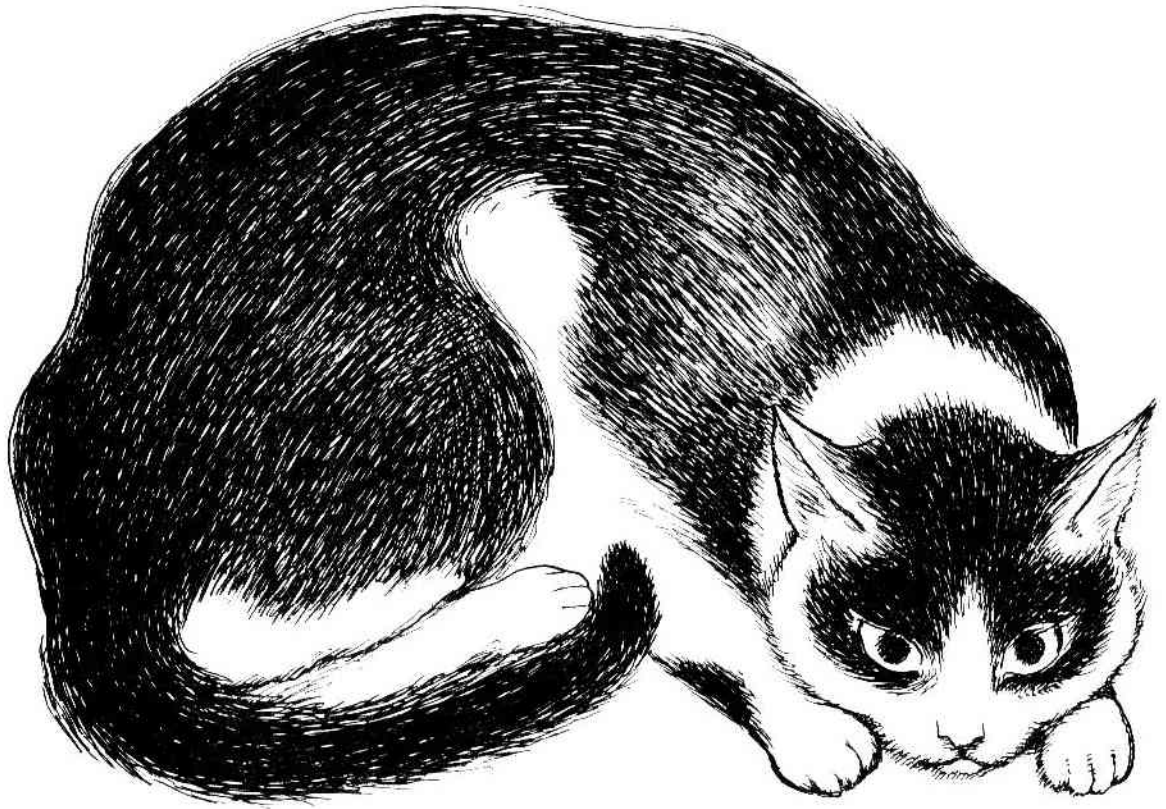
Well, I did inquire. It was Edward Lear, Esquire,
a famous toff at goofing off.

Well whoo whoo gave him dispensation
to sully my good reputation?
I'm Minerva's owl, a high-class fowl
and a family man to boot.
For amorous dalliance I don't give a hoot.
And I would tell Mr. Lear that I have a wife
and I'd tell Mr. Lear I'm wedded for life.
I've been slandered. I think I'll sue.
If I do sue, will you sue too?

Nooo, for by my yowls estrusive
I proclaim my amours to be nonexclusive
and forfeit my right to sue, but good luck to you.
You say you're Minerva's owl?
Congratulations, I'm Aphrodite's pal.
Procreation, not litigation, is my thing.
I really swing.
And I would tell Mr. Lear
that I'm a real cool cat right here.
You won't catch me afloat
a year and a day on any boat.
So I laugh it off, wothehell, wothehell.
Like dear old Aunt Mehitabel,
I'll just say
toujours gai, toujours gai.

Prickly, fierce little cockleburr,
it's O.K. to relax your fright-wig fur.
The slings and arrows of the late, great Bard
I hope you'll purringly disregard.

"Hang off, thou cat, thou burr, vile thing. Let loose!" —Shakespeare.

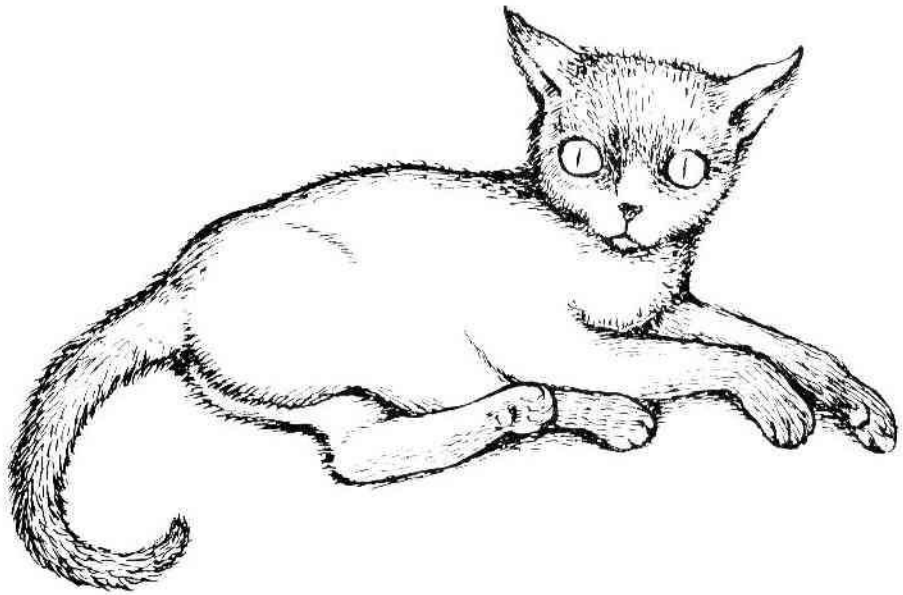


Libby

for Douglas Heen

She was no female in ruffles and laces
and if she chose she kicked over the traces.
Her pet name was Libby, short for women's liberation.
Had she been human she'd have ruled the nation.
She controlled her three siblings, all of them male,
with a flip of the wrist, a twitch of the tail
for they knew that her silk velvet paws
held a full set of razor-sharp claws.

She was not really a blood-thirsty miss
and often controlled with a sibilant hiss.
When she decided her life's work was done
she chose to die, age twelve plus one.
She was placed on a pallet of fern and rosemarie
and buried beneath a friend's apple tree.
Some gossip said she had gone to join witches.
If she'd lived to hear that she'd have been in stitches.



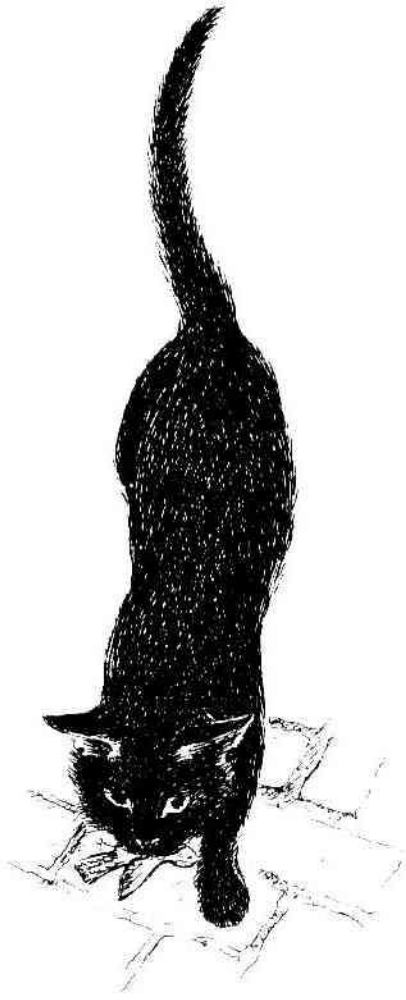
The Man with a Pet Platypus

He chose a pet that was rare, almost heraldic
a snare to catch ooohs and ahhhhs and what's that there?
His *outre* taste was not *ordinaire*.
Poor dear, he could have achieved all that
with a Rex or a Manx or Abyssinian cat.
What a waste, but there's no accounting for taste.

"Myth has it that Diana, to protect her virginity, changed herself into a cat and fled to the moon for safety. While there, as cat-moon, she daily devoured the grey mice of twilight. When she returned to earth she marked the moon with her image." — Frazer's *Golden Bough*

Garden Plot

Sun-warmed bees droned low over the earth-hugging lippia
A garter snake, shy as a whisper, slithered into the rockery.
A black cat, lanky and lynx-eyed
crouched low in the green, green grass,
whimpering, chittering, eyeing a whirr
of humming birds, ruby-throated
sip from the blossoms of the jasmine vine
whose roots shared the soil
with tiny accordian earthworms.



Doggie Don't

Doggie dear,
when you do what you do to doo-doo
why can't you doo the way pussycats doo?
You can dig a hole with pride and elation
to bury a bone for exhumation.
Why can't you by cat emulation
cease to drop dreck all over creation?
And if you were a doggie-super,
you'd carry your own little pooper scooper.
By day I may step out of the way
but I still get your essence in my nose-gay.
Doggie, do you get pleasure out of my pain?
This tail of woe has the same old refrain
Don't do it, don't do it.
Nobody likes the way you bestrew it.
But if after this you persist as a crapper,
please put it in a plain brown paper wrapper.

Grim Reaper

for Bill Scogland

Round robin, each spoke of the way he'd choose to die
when tapped by that rancid boogey-man guy
with a long-handled scythe and a hole for an eye.

Bill said I want to drop dead healthy.

Aye, aye, I do agree,
it eliminates hospital bed-pannery.
So I made a will, signed papers
cleared the closet, did other capers
but left one thing in disarray —
will my pet cat become a stray?
So if I do drop dead, please fill the gap.
Take the darling on your lap
he'll purr if stroked in the right way.
And give him the full run of the house —
he'll eliminate many a mitching mouse
and if you'd be so very kind
remember that catnip's on his mind.
It gives him a jolly roll in the hay.
Well, that's about all I have to say.

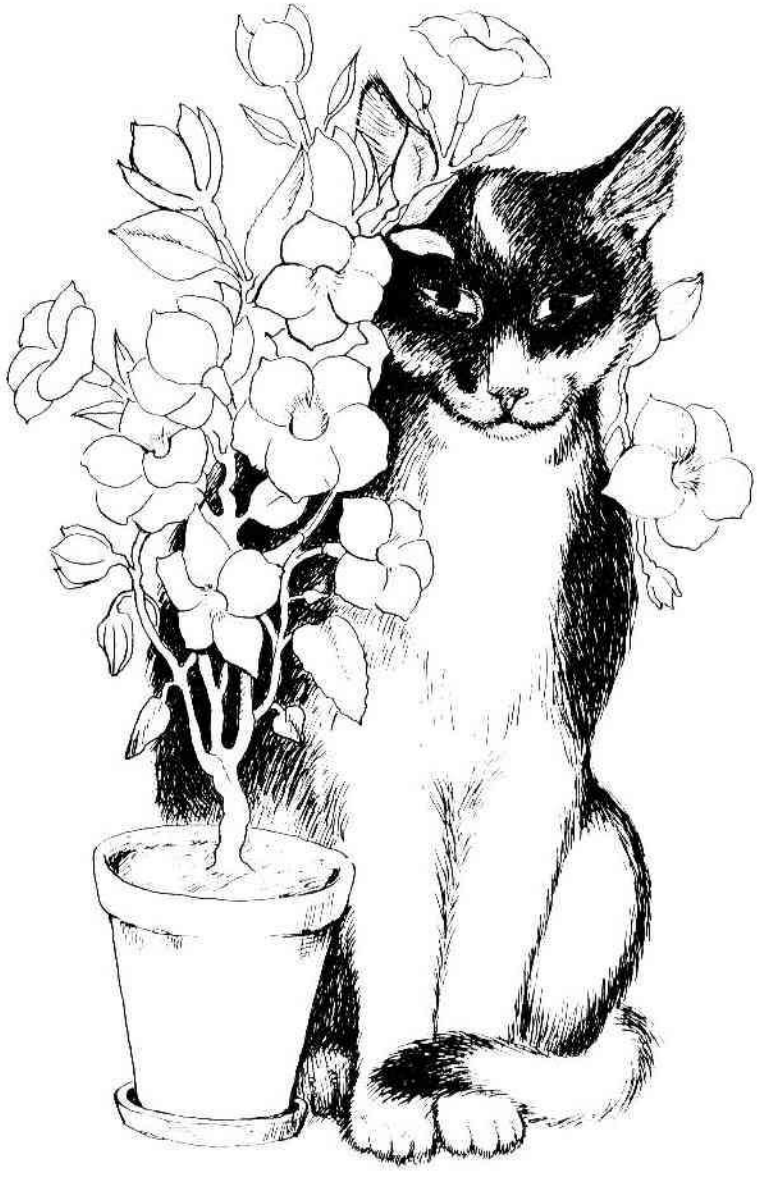
Oh, one thing more. I do hope
you'll water the thirsty heliotrope.

Pretty Kitty

Deprived of sex by a vile incision
she toyed with life in an oddball vision
skitting through her playful illusions
to some very strange conclusions.
She purred like a brook when stroked the wrong way
and never ever turned night into day.
A neutered tom was her special hate
although he shared her fruitless fate.

Minou, as nutty as a fruitcake,
clung to an endearing mistake.
She claimed to have been a feather boa
When she had lived on the Ark with Noah.

Skat, tomcat.
Tomcat sat.



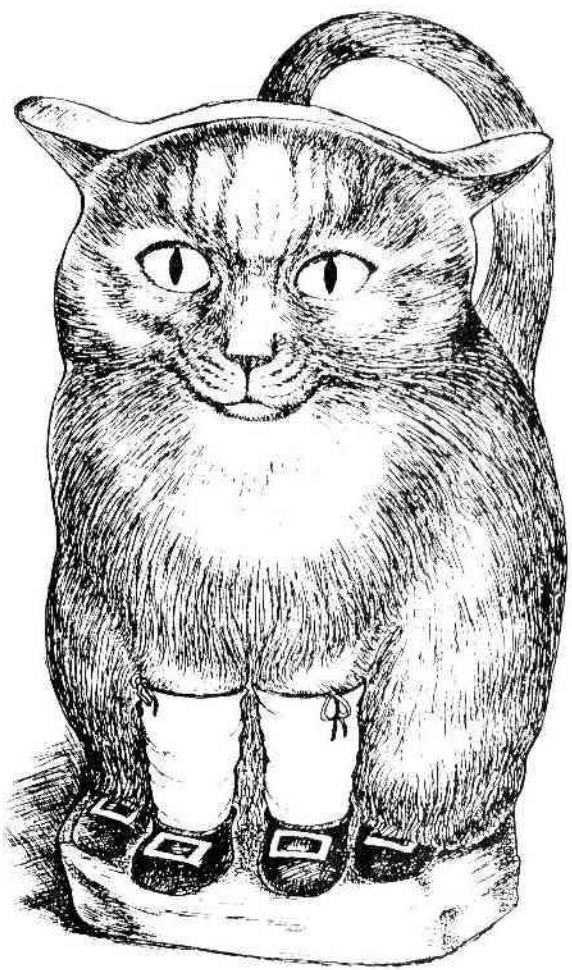
"Take a cat. Foster him with milk and tender flesh and make his couch of silk." — Chaucer

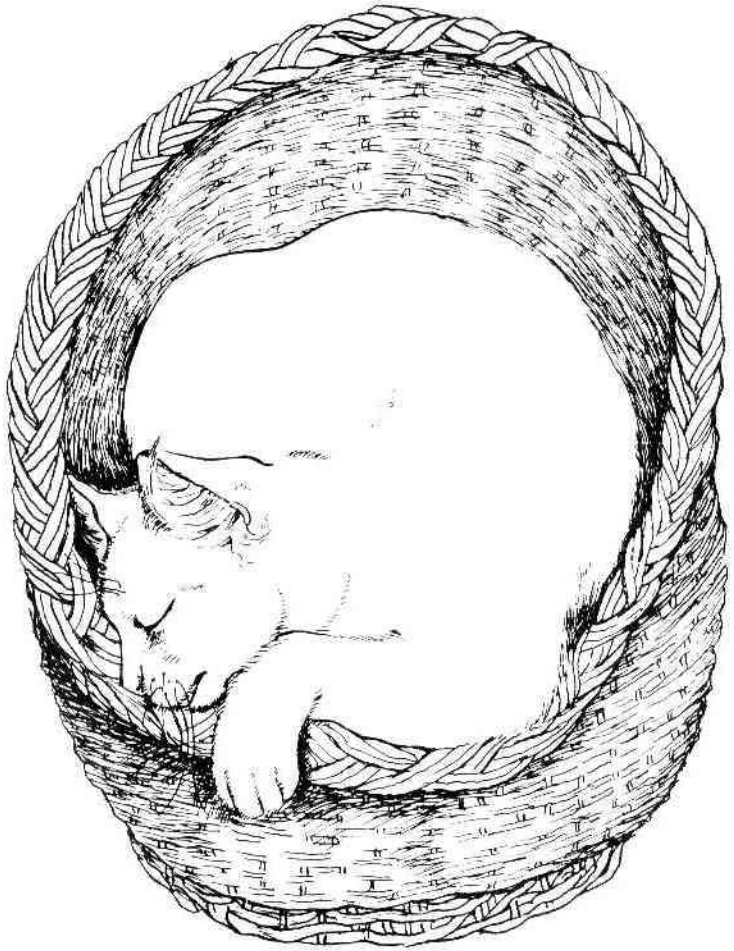
Isis Crisis

I ate high on the lotus when the Nile ran free
protected and pampered by royal decree.
Never think one of us is a mere alley cat.
Remember the throne on which we once sat.
And if you should see me with a faraway gaze
I'm recalling the joy of those halcyon days
when I protected the granary
and all of Egypt bowed low to me.

Toby Mug

He crouched over the bowl
in an opiate dream
while his querulous tongue
lapped and lapped cream.
He expressed no desire for farewell hug
he was so busy becoming a Toby mug.





Incomparable cat, it's all set
I'm going to name you Colette.

Run Children

Run, Children! Take this bag of gold and run.
Scatter bright bits in the quick beginning
to stay the metal-blind who'll come to find you.
They'll stop for each piece of the shining stuff
and you'll go free.

Run, Children! You'll find shed horns of Unicorns,
and feathers dropped from winging birds
to put for fun in your tousled hair.
Stain your mouths with wild berries
and laugh again.

Run, Children. Run!

Drawn by Melinda Alexander, age 6

She didn't like her meliflorus name
and wanted to join the "Linda" game
so she scratched it out. That was that!
and proudly proclaimed, "I am a cat!"

No Cat Writes Doggerel

The adored old cat is warm-hunched against me,
purring over what he is seeing, feeling,
not needing to share his secret vision
with one who watches his smiling purring.

KING BIJOU

You and I know that kings are passé,
I wish Milady could see it that way.
I've never been just a feline pet,
the Deluded One is so beset.
I'm kept in a silken cocoon
and fed caviar from a silver spoon.
I'm just a bijou in her huge jewel box
she equipped with burglar alarms and locks.

I've not tried to jump from the fourteenth floor
nor meowed to get out at the bolted door.
Would you agree that it's no joke
for a cat to be stifled in an ermine cloak?
Milady's ideas are so bizarre,
would a Papal ring be going too far?

Hocus Pocus

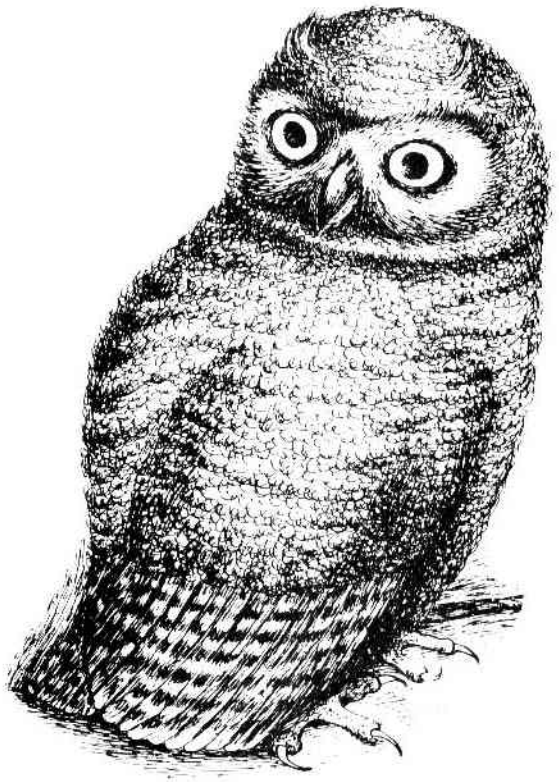
Yes, yes that's who I am
a royal scion of old Siam.
We're cut down to such low degree
I accepted the twigs of a willow tree.
woven into a basket as fit for me.
But memories of palacial spaces
showed me what my present disgrace is
so by wizardry fantastic
I've reduced my lady to fit the basket
so that she can see for herself
the torture of willow stick on the pelf.
Then I took over her downy bed
put her downy pillow under my head
and inspite of her piteous mewing
continued the dream I am pursuing.

Solo

I sing me
marvelous me
with my very own thumbprint identity
but I would join chorus with those
who play and dance the circle of the day
round any mistletoe sacred tree
with levity.

I sing you
marvelous you
you have your own thumbprint I.D. too.
But mostly I sing me
as with a tremor of temerity
I thumb my nose at mortality.

Village Road Map



for Grendel Winkler

Come along — it's no big deal
no feather in one's cap
not a go at the Matterhorn or Everest
or even the gentle mound of Assisi.
Airs and graces and yodeling gear
are not *de rigeur*
when climbing the rugged clay road to the ranch gate.

I go grungy from boots to brittle straw hat
anchored to my chin by shoelaces.
But I carry a splendid walking stick
driftwood scrounged from North Jenner beach
when sunset glistened the wet wood
disclosed its shape and stamped it with my name.

Come along if you care to,
I say to the black cat swooning against my ankle.
He sputters that only mad dogs etc. go out in the noonday sun
then stalks me to the cuve
by the one-room schoolhouse
and shelters beside a bush.
He shoots little arrows of protest after me
but they lodge in the cracks and potholes
of the weary pavement and miss their mark.

The way is steeper now
and a hedge of myoporum and towering cypress trees block the view below.
On ahead in full sun in full bloom
spreading glory, the five-foot span
of a white rose bush waves me down.
I lean into its halo of fragrance
and think of cuttings brought West
in covered wagons by women who hungered
for the flowers of home.
I think of Pomos, sisters in their love of beauty,
who planted no roses on dry hillsides,
but searched river banks and marshes for sedge root
to weave into precious baskets.

A few steps ahead I am saddened and angry.
Damn that split second of synchronicity
when a jeep wheel crushed the gliding body
of a timid, harmless garter snake.
All thumbs, I pick up the body and lay it on the ground in the chaparral.

Mea culpa! I startled a quail who had nested her brood in the chaparral.
With quicker feet than wit she scurries her chicks
across open space into tall, dry grass
with the flutter and purr of a taffeta pettycoat,
the kind my mother chose to wear.

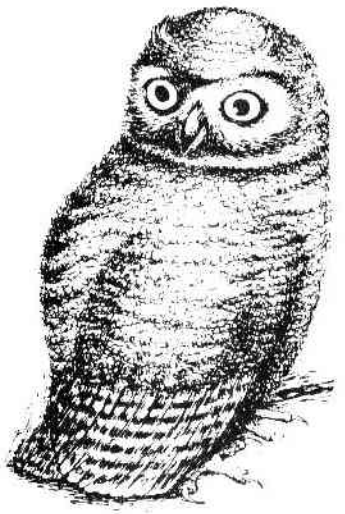
Across the way a downhill road opens up the view.
Village rooftops do not obscure
the dunes, the mouth of the river,
the sea, or the receding fog.
With a bit of luck and the right wind
raging motors on the highway
will not shut out the sound
of seals and their pups lolling on the dunes,
or the shriek of gulls or the flap-flap of pelicans
slapping the surface of the river.
Out there, the fog seems unwilling to burn off
and is busy erasing the horizon line
between sea and sky.

One day fog crept up the river,
crept up the steps to my house
and draped my door with crepe.
I took the crepe into my hands
expecting the feel of ashes
but found my palm filled with fine crystaline dust
I could offer as food to the yellow iris
Terry had loved.

On up the hill using the stick
for the crackled cement gives way
and rutted clay takes over.
It's just about here I lay a curse on all pampas grass,
that plume – flaunting floozy who scatters her seeds to the wind.
Even wild mustard seed tossed out by Padres
was not as invasive as her stuff.
She spreads her roots wide and grabs soil where native plants once grew.
Look quickly — that cerulean flower is chickory
that tiny chyrsanthemum feverfew.
Poppies are losing their glow but snake grass gleefully rattles.

On up ahead, a cluster of pine trees.
There's where the deer come down at night.
They jump the fence between pasture and pine,
grinning as they land.
They nestle down for a while
leave an impress of their bodies.
They're awaiting the witching hour for marauding
when they'll nibble their way down
to rendezvous at the river.
A doe with a fawn will linger and meander.
She's teaching her young about *bonne cuisine*.
She rips off the leaves of Betty's rhododendron
then spits them out with a warning —
Poison! Poison! But yum yum
to mirabel plums and Persian lilac.

I pick up a ripening pinecone
and trade it for the apple in my pocket.
I'm going to play trickster now
and conjure a rabbit out of a stone.
That pyramidal rock outcropping,
halved as if split by a monstrous cleaver,
is his hideway, wisely ringed round by a poison oak moat.
I stand at the drawbridge and wave the apple, wafting the scent his way.
Abracadabra! There he is!
He's almost the color of stone.
He's crouched with his fabulous ears laid back
more than half the length of his body
but his nose is high in the air and he knows
that his twitching nose knows the odor of apple.
I toss the apple his way — Pronto! up go those semaphore ears
alert to the vibes of a blade of grass bending.
I back away softly.
I promise not to betray him nor beat a path to his door.
I warn him that when gun-toting jeeps hurtle down from the hill
and careen in dust past the salt lick
they're getting close, so be wary.
When they slam on their brakes at the ranch gate
and clang heavy chains against metal. Hide, hide!
Don't let them for kicks use you as target.
Don't let them for kicks blow you away.



Moving on, I toss the pine cone into a ditch where winter rains will find it.
Springtime warmth will send roots delving into the soil
and a brave young seedling will begin to reach for the sky.
I fantasize that someday come hell or high water
somebody's great-great-grandchild will find a tree to treasure.

Across the way is a spot for viewing.
As I said early on, it's no big deal,
no snowclad peaks, no Bridal Veil falls,
nothing to click the camera for Ansel Adams
but it's a pretty sight with the molded hills folding into each other
and the river snaking down through the valley,
politely parting to create a prow for canoe-shaped Penny Island.
Josefa knows that once the water of the river was clean.
Josefa knows that wild strawberries were there for the taking
if you climbed to the top of the dunes.
Josefa knows that this was the cherished land of her grandmother's people.
And I know that ruthless landgrabbers invaded the inner valleys
massacred the people, scorned their culture,
then raged on down to gouge the hills, erode the land,
and fell the giant redwoods.
Those picayune people, axe in hand and hairy chest uplifted,
posed in stupid pride beside the fallen monarchs.
They dumped debris and their own filth into the virgin river,
then scourged on down to the Coast
to euchre the land away from Josefa's people.

But who am I to point the finger?
I live in a house built of redwood
on land stolen from Josefa's people.

I doff my mood and don cap and bells and caper on up to the ranch gate.
It's made of metal strips that tinkle when you tap it.
I tap it once for Grendel and it tingles.
I tap it for Tom and his keen eye for artifacts.
Then I give it a hearty whack to rattle the no trespassing sign
that puts a limit to my walk.

A Whimsy for G.S.

Trailing a hint of mimosa
Scarlet leggings slightly wrinkled
a strut of Parisian pigeons
bobbing and cooing
fantailed along Rue de Fleurus
to the corner of Rue Madame
back and forth back and forth
full pout
they stop only at number two-seven
her doorway
where they cream the banquette in her honor.
They were not on the grass, alas.
Alas they were not on the grass.

> Within the sanctuary a fine and mellow woman
> said without equivocation
> rose is a rose is a rose.
> Any fool's nose knows rose is a rose.
> Yes, indeed, said her friend Alice B.
> And I want you to know
> and I know that you want to know that I want you to know
> such knowledge is my own
> but I would share it.
> Yes, indeed, said Alice.
> It's hard to be profound
> even with the help of brownies.

Just then a heavy painting of an overflowing Stein
slid of its own weight down the wall
and came to rest upright on a rose velvet sofa.
Alice was amused.
Picasso has sent us a guest, she said,
and there she sits like an ancient Buddha.
Gertrude was tolerant but looked away,
not wishing to see herself in the painting.
Alice, she said,
I want you to know
and I know that you want to know that I want you to know
I love America, the U.S.A., that is,
since I don't have to live there.
And I want you to know,
et cetera and so forth,
I cannot live where
there is no there there.
There, there, dear, said Alice, one can always visit.

Airborne from Boise, Idaho when there was a proposed boycott of Idaho potatoes, a potato farmer protesting made this remark:
"I got me 16 kids. I gave 'em life. And I asked God for every one of them before I went to bed with my wife."

I felt that this remark was too revealing to let go unrecorded.

Eula Long

HOWL-LAY-LOO-YA ?

O man, how grand that your mighty clubber
never knew the restraint of prophylactic rubber,
that yours was not Love's Labor Lost,
that your wife was fecund and easily bossed.

Did you ever think of becoming a Latterday Saint
with multiple wives to share morning complaint?
How grand it would be when they all come to term
and proved you'd not wasted your sacred sperm.

Do you know—O perish the thought—
that your sperm might be stolen, then frozen, then bought?
That some atheist with a few filthy coins
could garner the fruit of your holy loins?

Man, do you ever do it just for pleasure
or only dig for buried treasure?
I can see you now, patting your fly
to be sure your tool's sharp enough to comply.

Don't worry, all that meat and no per-ta-ters
doesn't mean you, you're as raunchy as satyrs.
But it seems to me that you're mentally sick
to force dirty work on your elegant prick.

Pardon this next remark, but by Zeus,
you should study demographics and read Malthus.
What if all your sixteen kids,
Like Daddy-O, gave full play to their ids?

They'd beget and beget and beget by the dozens,
Dozens and dozens of too many cousins,
'til they smother the earth with diaper cotton
and layers and layers of babes misbegotten.

Proud Pro Lifer, show no concern,
there'll be many a son.
You can have your own army
like Attila the Hun.

Desert Song Updated

Above Palm Springs an obliging mountain
halts inflowing coastal fog.
Arrow-sharp rocks, strangely compliant,
guard the town against hoi polloi.
Swimming pools chlorinated reflect a private gilt-edged sky
shiver to the roar of Leer jets.

An ancient Indian drags hose to quench thirst of alien plants.
Yesterday he saw diesel truck sneak in load of muy exotic shrubs.
Today sees shrubs guy-wired to patio wall of new hotel.

Manager Boniface greets incoming guest,
estimates solvency, slaps him on shoulder.
Guest, to show savvy, makes joke —
Who owns this spread? Mafia, haha?
Boniface grins stringently. Let's say Bunkamerica, haha.
Guest nods knowingly. I hear the goddamned squawmen
claim title to this land.
Yup, and that's a laugh. My cash buys chow for half of, of, of...
They cross patio, voices dwindle.

Non-person Indian shuts valve
tilts hat over enduring eyes
smiles a closed smile and softly pads away.
He knows that shaman foretells that soon, very soon,
these water pipes will hiss only hot air.
Swimming pools will die of thirst
and tremor their tiles into the arid sand.
Scorched golf links will crinkle and shrivel
like so many atrophied scrotums.
Angry rain god will howl the wind, unbolt lightning
drumroll thunder and cloudburst an engorged sky.
flooding the land to purify it.
Then and only then will coyote consent
to cross the arroyo to woo the moon at midnight.
Then and only then will the Great Spirit resurrect the crucified land
the Indians' sacred ancestral land.

Sic Transit the Pontiff

The whited old man
ankle-ironed by Vatic pride
jet-lagged from god-trotting the globe
brain-fagged from spewing buzzwords
bone weary from patting the bellies
of females fecund as fruit flies
hoarse from damning the condom and the pill
while condoning the rhythm scam
the old man failing infallibility
nightly prayed for dreamless sleep
because of late a sphincter muscle
had fallen from grace
depleting him of holy water.
No act of faith could heal it
and night after night
in dream after dream
a tidal wave of
wailing, starving, skeletal babies
crashed over his celibate bed
mangled him to unsex him
then tossed him to the rack of agonized childbirth.
The old man, purged of pride,
nightly begged for dreamless sleep.

What? Watt?

A seagull, aghast,
gauled by a greedy gut grabbing for oil
gauged his glide
and let go a gamey garum
that garnished a gung-ho goon.
"Anointed by heaven! It's the second coming,"
cried One-Quarter-Watt Watt,
whose hollow halo no longer glistened,
being garbaged.

No Nukes Please

Well, well, I've made it into the nuclear age
Hip hip hooray, bombs away, bombs away.
It's the age of the clanking steel robot
the cyborg that mocks the skill of the human hand.
It's the age of the silicon chip
and the software of Carol Doda,
of TV trash and video porn
and the God Almighty computer,
the Mickey Mouse numbers game
that has us all pegged.
Well, that's progress
but when progress calls itself Apple
I lose my taste for pie in the sky.

1960

I'm addicted to denim.
It's blue and it's cotton
and it ain't misbetotten
by chemistry.
Plastic makes me spastic.

City Birdbath

On a puddle of stagnant water
trapped by a curbside gutter
no blue sky was reflected
but on it floated
one crumpled chewing gum wrapper
two soggy cigarette butts
a film of city oil
and one small, brown, songless bird
who fluttered about
as if bathing.

Calling François Villon

Eh, Frankie. Eh la bas!
You rakehell poet immortal, gallow's bait
survivor by wit s end and monk's ruse.
You've been gone too long, man, gone too long.
Come back, full circle and sound.
We need your *savoir faire,* your savvy.
You were street-smart, Frankie,
witty with a tongue for truth.
Come tell the bastards off
lay it on the line.
Meet me down by Chat Qui Peche.
Bring along a bag of goober dust.
We'll sprinkle the creeps in control
and cure their itch to burn the privy down.

Crows

for Richard Hieb

Cawing cawing
the crows are coming
clustering in from fields and marshes
homebound for their nightfall tree
sundown glow at their backs.

Cawing cawing
the crows are coming
a consenting chorus, yea! yea!
They'll adorn the limb of their chosen tree
with a show of jet-black origami.

Cawing cawing
the crows are coming
overhead now swift and sure
a Zen artist's sumi brush stroke
on the pearl grey paper sky.
Cawing, cawing, the crows went by.

Spiders Spiders Everywhere

I've made a pact with spiders —
if they let me live my life
I'll let them live theirs.
I'll even sing their praises
but I won't sing praise for that silly highborn thing
called Daddy Long Legs.
He's so icky and he hangs from the ceiling over my bed.

I won't praise that flamboyant thing called a Black Widow
who sports a scarlet hourglass on her belly
and siphons off her liquified mates.

But I'll sing praise for that tiny golden bead called
an Audacious Jumping Spider
who swings through the air and vaults such spaces
as would put an Olympic champ to shame.

And I'll praise the Trapdoor Spider, master weaver
who creates a lace-covered hoop
that exactly fits the opening of its earthen hideaway.
The finely-crafted hinge of that lacy hoop
marvels me more than the pyramids which are, after all,
only stones, stacked by the sweat of man on stones.

I sing praise of the Tarantula,
awesome folkloric brigand of the desert,
so handsome in his sealskin coat
you'd stroke him if you had the courage.
I once rode a pinto across the desert floor
and almost pitched over his head
he stopped so suddenly.
Why? Because a Tarantula crossed his path
on its way to the shade of a cactus bush.
I shiver just saying the word Tarantula,
and I know why gypsies dance the Tarantella.

I give one small kudo to the Reclusive Brown Spider,
that little imp who prefers to nestle in the woodpile
and will pinprick you with a dose of poison if you bother it.

But I sing *Gloria Gloria* for the wondrous lace
once laid across the window of my house
by a brown and yellow spider
the size of the palm of my hand
who was no doubt descended
from spiders who had studied the Rose Window at Chartres.
His magnificent creation of concentric circles
trapped the morning dew and held it as crystal beads
that rainbowed the sunlight.
He would sit motionless for hours beside the lace
waiting for nothing less than a Monarch butterfly
to twang its threads and finish his design.
I wailed like a banshee and dropped a tear
the day a dullard arachnephobe murdered that spider.

Ollie North

Ollie North, among fly-by-night heroes
had ethics a notch below Nero's
but when caught in a lie
he could moisten his eye
and emit the scent of a tea-rose.

Blood 'n guts Ollie, gung ho
Marine
Had morals not fit to be seen
So with his capacity
For skirting veracity
He cloaked them in Contra-
ban green

Turkey Buzzard

On the crest of the hill
when the earth rolled over to let the sun go down
a hang-gliding buzzard dropped its icy shadow on me.
I look up — he's a fearsome bird
with his wings spread wide
and his gargoyle head hung low.
Without blinking he's giving me the evil eye.
In primal fear I whisper, okay, okay,
so you found me
but surely you excel in vulturing
and can see that I'm not quite ready for your bloody beak.

Whether he heard me or not, he flaps away
to join his circling companions.
When he's out of earshot
I toss insults at him.
Sirrah, you're no rara avis
you're no endangered specie.
You're not our national pride, the bald eagle,
you're not Tsarist Russia's double-header
nor are you golden.
You're no Andean condor
or Peregrine falcon.
You're just an old *zopilote*.
Did proud Mexico shoo you out?
When I said to the crumb-begging ninos in that bereft land
mas tarde, mas chicle
I did not include you in that promise.
I'm squeamish — I've signed papers that consign me to ashes
and cheat you of a hearty meal in a country pub.

But don't worry, old carrion-eater,
you'll never go hungry,
for this lop-sided, blood-'n'-guts, shoot-'em-up world
has a great need for more and more scavengers.

Two Poets

An old woman needled verse through a machine
tapping and clicking
tapping and clicking
knitting a garment no one
but no one
would ever wear.
Finally fed it to the wastebasket
and the wastebasket fed it to the fire.

A young poet, giddy from hunger,
tried eating his own words.
No go.
Choked on boney metaphors,
he sharpened his pen on the stone of apathy
and slashed his rhythms,
died nobly,
quoting Dylan Thomas of course.

For Miriam, Not Quite Eight Years Old

Miriam, a waning moon.
We watched the shadow of her illness
eclipse her precious life.
Before the time had come for lying still
we'd lift her gently
place her in a warmish pool
sustain her with our hands.
Her black hair fanned out on the water,
a lilypad to frame the flower of her face.
We'd smile as she smiled
when her fragile hands made ripples in the water.
Water was her delight.
I wish we could have filled the pool
with dewdrops from a fragrant rose.
She had loved to sit at the window and watch children cycle by.
What are their names? May I someday know them?

She never knew them nor did she ever know
the blighted money-tethered men
in trillion dollar labs who whore their flaunted genius
that turns matter into death.
Miriam was one of many moons they never reached
nor in their madness cared.

Minimal

I am minimal, obscure
but persistent — my oh my
far out, far out
but with the aid of a lens from Palomar
you might discover me
high in the circus tent top of a gingko tree
tight-wire walking the edge of a yellowing leaf.

Netted

Netted in a chrysalid dream
a weightless flutter of vibrant color
stroked the palm of a midnight dreamer.
Awakened at pitiless dawn
the searching eye found only the trace
of a grey moth's dusty passage.

Small Boy Imagines a Bird Flying

Mother! Mother!
I saw a bird flying!
Junior, you must curb your lying.
All the birds in the world are either stuffed or in cages
and haven't been flying about for ages.
Well, I heard chirping and saw wings flapping.
Junior, I do believe you were napping.
You see, birds failed to adapt to the task
of wearing a life-preserving gas mask.
So, like the Dodo, they all had to go.
Too bad, too bad, but don't look so sad.

Small Boy Imagines a Beach

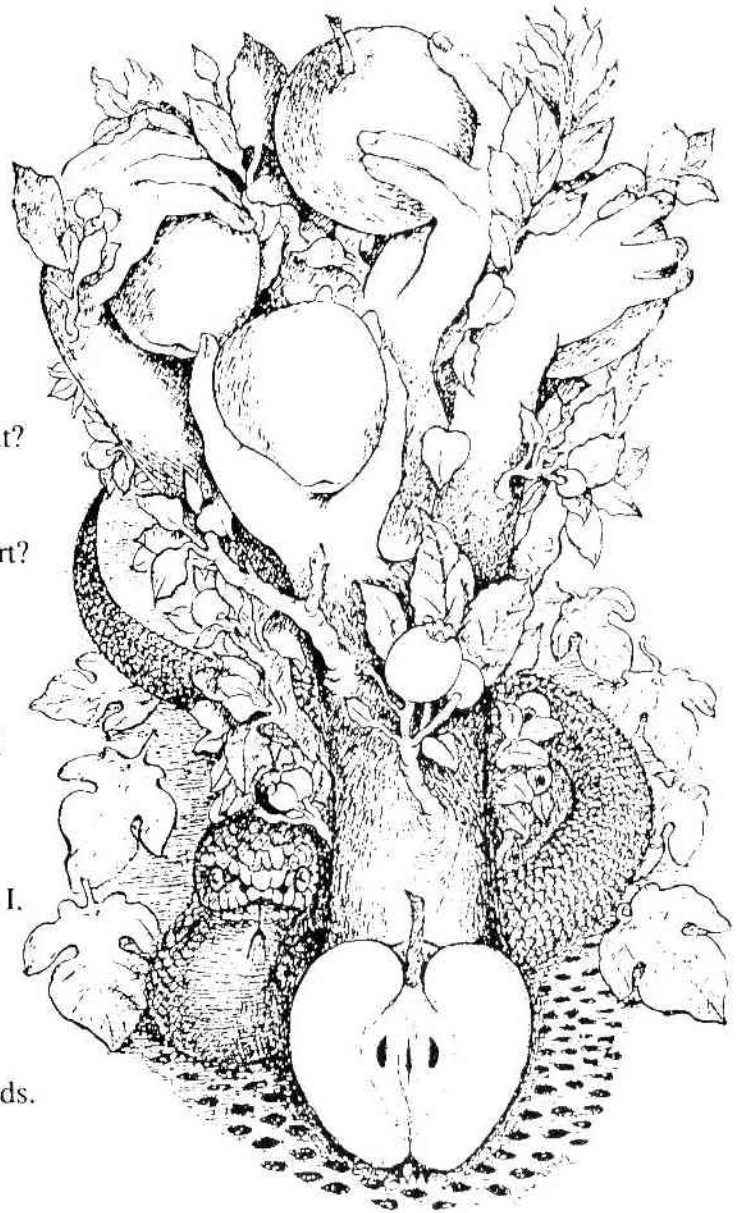
Mother! Mother!
I saw a beach. I saw a beach!
Junior, lying again? Or a figure of speech?
All the world's beaches are chain-linked and guarded
as dumps for filth and junk discarded.
You see, that was homo sapiens' solution
for disposing of our offal pollution.
Well, I saw sand, and I ran about.
Oh, Junior, Junior, you're making me shout.
kick off those sandals. Dispose of them quickly.
Scrub yourself in the tub before you get sickly.
Oh dear, oh dear, I fear I have failed
to teach you, my child, about what has prevailed.

Small Boy Imagines a Tree

Mother! Mother!
I saw a tree!
A real live tree
right there in front of me.
Junior, how many times must I
discipline you for telling a lie?
The only live tree in the world is guarded at Kew,
and Kew is a long long way from you.
Well, it didn't look like a plastic tree.
It looked like a real live tree to me.
And Tommy thought so too,
so I came running to tell you.
Junior, the value of trees is moot.
They shed their leaves and they drop their fruit,
and it really was a disgrace
the way they took up parking space.
But I'm glad one tree is left, though it's far, far away,
and I hope you'll get to see it someday.

A Myth Revised

How was it, Eve,
dear Eve,
who helped you split the fruit?
Did Adam chomp his share
greedily?
Did the snake hiss for his part?
Why the myth of your evil
intention?
Did the man-god drive you
from paradise?
Why to this day be a symbol
of original sin
as the moralists agree
that you are?
Who blames you, Eve? Not I.
I'd give you a medal.
May I call you Johnny
Appleseedess?
For it was you who spread
the arcane knowledge of seeds.



High Tech

I swooned when I learned from a cultured professor
that Shakespeare had no word processor
that Dante penned odes to Beatrice
with no transcriber to make it felice
that Sappho's fragments of verse I revere
without megadata got from her to here.
Poor William Blake made his earthly trip
without the aid of a silicon chip.
Voltaire and Walt Whitman, social disputers,
did their thing without computers.
I sigh, I mope, I keen,
dreaming of things that might have been,
but I'd be clanging all Hell's Bells
had the printout proscribed the Book of Kells.

Lamb Chops

Ooooh, look,
see the pretty little lambs
huddly, cuddly baby lambs
gamboling on the meadow green.
See their pretty little faces
note their many little graces
Watch them twitch their little tails
as they prance on dainty feet.
Hear their plaintive maaaa, maaaa bleat
huddly cuddly baby lambs
gamboling on the meadow green.
Can you look them in the eye
as they're carted off to die?

Lines to my Alter Ego

And now, false twin
alter ego, genetic reject
or whatever you are
what more do you want?
All my years you have clung to my back
like a stick-tight flea to a hound dog.
You toddled onstage at my birthing,
you gobbled my goodies,
you crowded my cradle,
you straddled my little go-cart.
You tripped when I skipped rope
you belly-flopped when I dived
and you shrieked when I sang.
You kicked up your heels in my tutu.
And later you even danced tandem
with me and my lovers.
And I do mean my, for I am I
and you are you.
You are you
with a chance we or a petulant me too.

Well I must say you've worn out your welcome.
I toss a glance over my shoulder into a clouded mirror
and see that you're still there.
If I break the glass with my stick
it will fall in tiny fragments,
little arows that point to an exit.
Will you take the hint and move on,
get lost and leave me be?

A Spider

I'm saying goodbye to a spider
who shared my bathroom for several weeks.
I'm saying goodbye not certain that it's dead
but it hasn't moved of late
and its body, tissue thin, has lost its sheen,
so I guess it's goodbye.
When I first saw it I thought it was a scribble
on the white wall.
Before I could reach for a sponge,
the scribble wiggled, moved a little
and eight thread-thin legs solemn as pallbearers
lifted it gently and carried it to the ceiling
and placed it in a corner.
And there, as a good guest should,
it minded its manners.
It paid no heed to a body in the bathtub
nor seemed to object to steam.
I grew very fond of that little spider
who did no public mating and did not reproduce itself.
Its lifeline was a very short thread of liqud silk,
delicate, evanescent.
I'll take the body into the garden and place it under a fallen leaf.

Senior Sit

I'm bemused by my longevity.
Since I no longer genuflect
by what grace am I still around?
I would sketch for you a likeness of my now
before time tick-tocks it away.

Today I signify as an old one
on lowered heels that just won't click to castanets.
Cozied by wool and down
I turn my back to the wind
unwilling to be a weathervane
unable to be a compass
pointing true north.

Cloaked in vanity, shocking pink
I reject the reflection grinning at me
as I leave the pharmacy.
I'm on my way to the bus stop
where, behind a picket of white canes,
wait the old ones.
We tend to cluster at bus stops
hoping there's a bench to rest on
and, if summer, a bit of shade.

I take my place among them
and lend an ear to a stranger
who would speak of her many ills
if she will lend me her ear
while I bemoan warmongers
and the pathos of chanting *no pasaran*.

I wait for my bus, half-fare in hand,
but I'm not eager to catch it
for the very short ride ahead.
I'm remembering an insect trapped in amber
on display as a museum treasure
that attracts a crowd of admirers
who gape in wonder at the ancient bijou.
Should I sketch a bug on my shoulder
and try to metamorphize
or just hang tough?

Wind-Up Toy Boy

What?! Three years old
and hair not cut?
Quick to the barber
no time to lose.
If he bellows when the scissors snap
strap him into the chair.

What?! Three years old and has no gun?
Quick to the smithy
no time to lose.
Press the butt of a gun
to the palm of his hand
before the flesh hardens.
Make him a man.

What?! Three years old and no GI's?
Quick to the tailor, no time to lose.
Rip off his softies and camouflage him.
Finish him off with a green beret.
Then wind the spring tight.
Wind the spring tight.

Draft 'Em with a Choke Chain

Down, dog, down!
Sit, stay, heel
Run, fetch, beg
Lie down, roll over
Play dead.

Down, boy, down!
Line up, sign up
Butch that hair,
Suck up ya guts
March, shoot, kill
Lie down, roll over
Bite the dust
Be dead.

Mission Accomplished

As rigid as robots
young soldiers in spattered uniforms
wrapped other young soldiers
rigid in death
in sackcloth and ashes
and packed them in boxes
row after row after row
to be shipped home.
The box lids snapped shut
like the alligator jaws
of the Pentagon.

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
— George Santayana

I love Germany so much I hope there will always be two of them
— François Mauriac

The Last Train from Dachau
a dialogue

Just hikin' about, getting the lay of the land.
What are you doing here in front of this cave?
The air coming out is putrid.

> Guard duty. I'm keeping Third Reich souvenir hounds from ripping the old train to pieces.
> Bet I'll wear out one more pair of GI boots before I get to go home.

Old train?

> Yeah, the last train from Dachau. They sidetracked it into this cave to store it.

Yeah, I see. That accounts for the stench. What of the other old trains that led to the camps — Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Treblinka?

> They're scattered about. Some hid out in the forest. Some took to the woods.
> Some of them never left Poland, some were burned on the tracks where they stood.
> The blood-rusted wheels wouldn't roll and the wooden boxcars had rotted.
> So they burned them where they stood. Good riddance.

Yeah, I'll say. Good riddance. Who are those men down there on the track and what are they doing?

> Those are old Storm Troopers. They're scraping the rails.
> Mighty low doings for once proud and haughty Storm Troopers.

Oh, yeah, they were stifff-necked and haughty. Who are those women, the helmeted women?

> Those are old Brunehildas; they call themselves the Valkyrie Chorus. They're egging them on.

Yeah, I see. And who are the drabs, the drabs standing in back of them?

> Those are the old KKK women — *kirche, kinder and kuche.*

Yeah? But they look like they're threading needles.

Kinder, Kirche, Küche [Ger.] 'children, church, cooking', an enumeration of the occupations fit for a woman. 20c. The words are sometimes arranged in other orders, of which *Küche, Kirche, Kinder* is perhaps the most common.

They're threading needles alright. They're using hair snatched from the heads of their victims and stored for many years for just this purpose.

What purpose?

They're going to mend the old Nazi flag. The swastika's torn and twisted.

I see, I see. So why are they all howling and moaning?

Well, it's like this.The old train in its youth, only doing its duty,
sought to gain favor and made of each wheel a matrix —
at least that's the way I heard it — and they rolled out numbers on the tracks,
millions and millions and millions of numbers.

Numbers? You mean like blue tattoo numbers?

Well, yeah, like blue tattoo numbers. And the old Storm Troopers, though they sharpened their knives, can't rid the rails of the blue tattoo numbers.

Yeah, so they're left there for all the world to see?

That's right. So with the blessings of the pope, they've decided to put up a sign —
a big, big sign — that says WE'RE SORRY, WE'RE SORRY.

Yeah, that figures. What are the names that went with the numbers,
the millions and millions of names that went with the numbers?

I believe they've been lost. The Nazis weren't keen on keeping records.
Maybe they burned them in the ovens. They had one hell of a lot of ovens.

Yes, they had ovens. But there's one name I hope will nver be lost.
Thta's the name of a brilliant, beautiful girl, Anne Frank. Remember her name always.
She kept a record she called her diary. They found her in her sheltering place
and dragged her away. But they didn't find her diary, her very, very invaluable diary.

Hey, you know so much. Why ask me so many questions?
Who are you, anyway?

I'm just a history buff wandering around, remembering the past,
trying to find answers to many, many questions.

Line-Up

Consider with compassion
the shambling addled boy-o
strapped and buckled to a box transistor
his lowered head and protruding tongue
wag obseisance to the God of Squawk.

Consider with compassion
the aging whore tripping by on stilted heels.
She's befumed by nicotine and patchouli.
Her hair is a bird's nest of bitter curls.
On a veil of stale cosmetics.
she has painted a scarlet cut-rate smile.

Consider with compassion
the raging godhawker
ravaged by dogma
toting a locust plague of pamphlets
he screams Armageddon, Armageddon
and drowns out birdsong.
Like Savanarola he burns in a fire of his own kindling.

Consider with compassion
the shave-head punk who saved one token curl for her mother,
she wearing grungy black cotton tights
and red pointy-toed Goodwill slippers.
She's wrapped in a huge olive-drab jacket
that serves as a wall for obscene grafitti.

Consider with compassion
the lanky, juvenile transient
humpbacked with his few possessions.
All signs warn you — homeless, hungry.
He's leading a garbage-fed dog
wearing its ribs on the outside,
its tail tucked between legs,
its nose to the ground,
sniffing for a chance favor.

Stop here, the line-up is much too long,
and I cannot see around corners.
Is the thread that could lead them out of the maze
a mess of rotten tangles?

For Nettie

She heard the bell toll but was not silenced.
Leaning into the wind, to test her strength,
she dared the edge of the cliff and was not
swept away. In her own time she gained the beach,
turned her back on the Seventh Wave and gathered
shells. She stared at the brightest star and
was not blinded, for she too was a path of light.

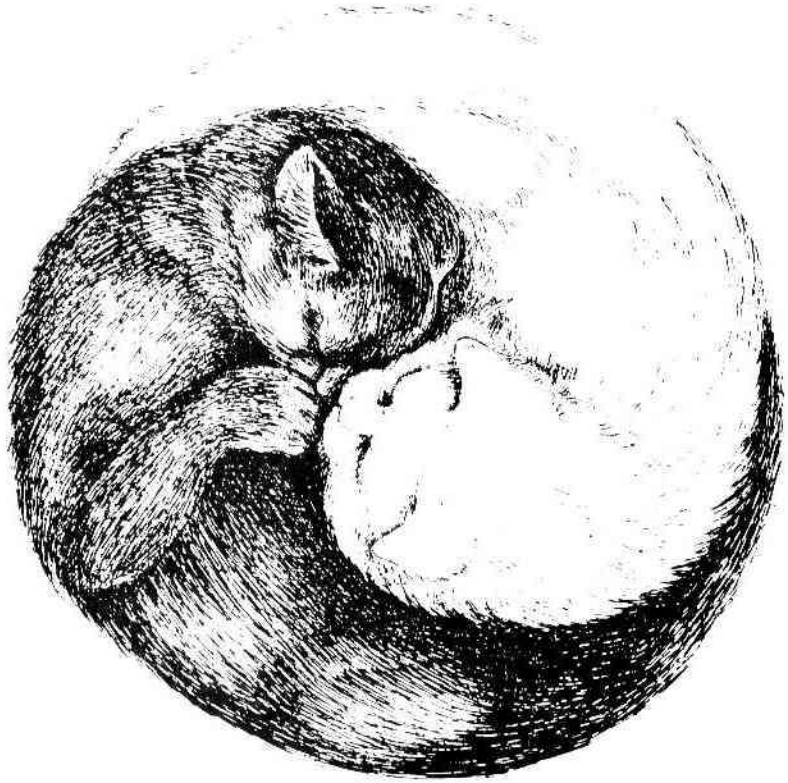
Bell-toll louder, she hurried to help clear old
roads blocked by troglodytes, and spoke of courage.
The sound of her voice was an echo from down the
ages, whispering poetry. Her gift to all women
was a lesson learned — one could walk naked in
rain, brave its needle pricks, laugh at the torrents
that would drown the challenger.

She splashed in muddy water and was not sullied.
May Day, she held hands with others entwining ribbons
around the pole and danced the symbolic circle.
Her laughter was tonic, her pain private. As the
last of the warning bells grew stronger, she lay
quiet, and quietly spoke sibylline thoughts we could
not follow.

...I think of Pomos, sisters in their love of beauty,
who planted no roses on dry hillsides,
but searched river banks and marshes for sedge root
to weave into precious baskets...

ITEM FOR TORI

Beautiful child, born of
two colors,
with a third thrown in
for good measure,
you are a dear,
a National Treasure.



Starlight, Starbright

At dusk, deep in the piney woods
Uncle Yancey's pack o' hounds
yelped for hushpuppy and clabber.
Courting bullfrogs flexed their bellows
and a lovelorn whippoorwill called for its mate.
The air was sweet with the scent of cape jasmine
plus the acrid stench of a chinaberry tree
my grandmother threatened to have cut down.

On such evenings my father gathered his children onto the side veranda
to map for them the stars he knew
to bind them forever to a love for the cosmos
and to marvel at the splendor of a chance meteor.
Our mother never joined us.
She had a sickening fear of bats.
She knew they were out of hell
eager to nest in her beautiful hair.
We were aware of her at the piano
as we waited for darkness to disclose the stars.
My father smiled when he told us
there were more stars in the Milky Way
than all the chiggers in all the lawns of the world.
What a good illustration — we kids sure knew what chiggers were —
infinitesimal bloodsuckers that scarlet the ankle with itching.

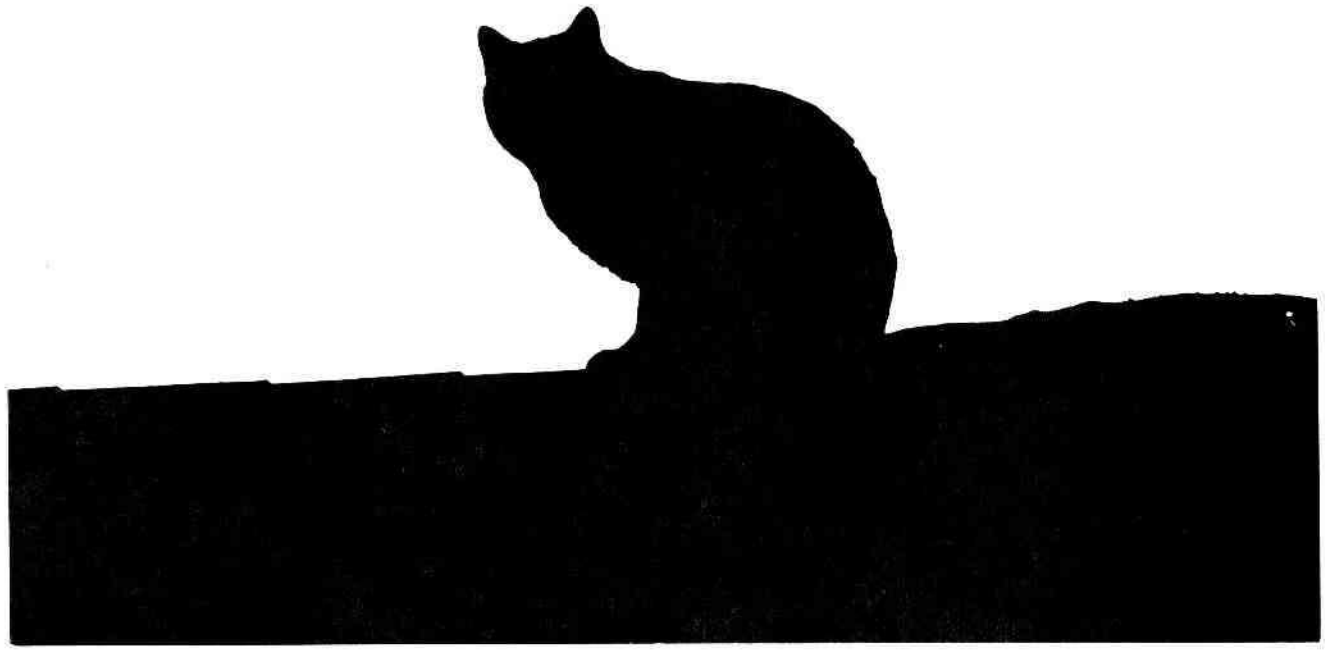
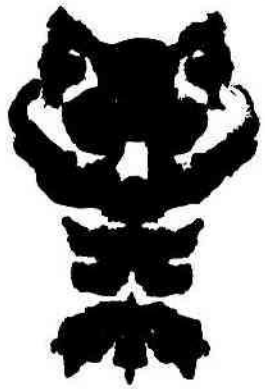
The child to first see a star could make a wish.
I remember wishing that some night a falling star
would sparkle down like a firefly
and let me catch it to cup in my hands.

That was all so long ago,
when the moon was a still untarnished silver orb
gliding across the sky
and Star Wars laser beams were just evil schemes
in madmen's eyes
madmen who hear no music of the spheres
but triple-tongue their brass war bugles
calling the docile young to die.
Those bugle blasts have curdled my cool,
roiled my soul, made of me a rancid Hecate
eager to stir a pot of witch's brew.
I'm fair-warning these star poachers
who chuck rocks at my father's sky
I'm going to put a hex on 'em, and it won't be just a voodoo doll
with pins stuck here and there.
I'll conjure up Uncle Yancey's ghost
and he'll whistle his hound dogs out of hell
and sic 'em down the trail.
Old Dingo, the meanest red-toothed hound that ever gnawed a bone,
will lead the pack, and they'll snarl their victims round and round
in a mad dervish dance till they drop with the thud
of the chinaberry tree my grandmother had cut down.
Then a stinking, squeaking clutch of bats will Medusa their fallen heads
and a Milky Way of chiggers will bind them in a mummy wrap
and bleed 'em to a fare-thee-well.
Then I'll sprinkle the lot with goober dust and call up a hurricane
that will spiral the mess cleanly away
while I shed a crocodile tear.

On Moving On

The escrow bird pecked out the letters of my name,
caw-cawed the closing date of sale
then flapped away.
The funky little house no longer belonged to me.
My dust-ingrained furniture
that had cozied up to redwood walls
must learn to live bravely with plaster
whiter than saints' blood
holier than thou.
My cache of treasured junk,
a chip off here,
a screw loose there,
must learn to hide in corners
and rag-bag chairs squat low on carpeting by Sears.
Tarnished copper must no longer flaunt my shame.
But I beg of the mirror
that once held a glimpse of the river
and the crest of Goat Rock hill
not to erase an image I hold dear:
A full moon high over a pink flowering hawthorne tree
pregnant with mimic apples
that would fruit in the fall
to comfort migrating birds.

Blithe spirit, dear Gris-Gris
preferred a rooftop to a tree
when in deep contemplation
of a vagrant from bird migration.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